## SENATE DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS

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## Water Concerns Dominate Environmental Forum

Senate Democrats Hold First in Series of Environmental Town Halls

ANN ARBOR- Water quality concerns were the overriding topic of conversation tonight at the first in a series of environmentally focused town hall meetings held by Senate Democrats and Michigan's leading environmental groups. Entitled, "Five Lakes, Two Peninsulas, One Michigan," the forums are intended to give citizens the opportunity to voice their concerns and suggestions about preserving Michigan's natural resources.

"We must be proactive in protecting our resources for our citizens, farms, and businesses," said Sen. Liz Brater (D-Ann Arbor). "These town hall meetings are intended to empower the public and bring attention to the threats to and limits of our natural resources." Sen. Brater has introduced legislation that will protect Michigan's control over its fresh water supply and give businesses predictable legislation by which to set their practices.

This evening's water quality discussion focused primarily on guaranteeing Michigan's access to and control of its own fresh water. Citizens shared their concerns surrounding issues such as closed beaches, fish kills, invasive species, and unfair attempts on the part of the Bush Administration to allow increased waste inflows to Michigan's lakes. Representatives from Clean Water Action, the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), Public Interest Research Group in Michigan (PIRGIM), and Ecology Center, an Ann Arbor based environmental advocacy organization, were on hand to provide expert commentary.

"Not only is it important that we protect our water resources, but we must also insist on accountability in monitoring and reporting the quality of that water," Sen. Mickey Switalski (D-Roseville) said. "The public is entitled to pure, clean water and full disclosure of its contents."

The repercussions of these water quality concerns are far-reaching. Roll backs in federal standards proposed by EPA would allow new sewage overflows into our lakes. People who swim in contaminated water are 100 to 1000 times more likely to become ill, and last year, Michigan experienced 209 days of Great Lakes beach closings. In addition to the costs associated with clean up, closings like this are damaging to tourism, Michigan's second largest industry. At the current rate, a new species is introduced to the Great Lakes every eight months, making it impossible for the ecosystem to stabilize itself and costing billions for power plants and municipal water suppliers which use the water.

In addition to water quality concerns, water consumption was also mentioned. The Great Lakes hold one fifth of the Earth's fresh water reserves. "Michigan Senate Democrats are working hard to preserve the quality of our state water supply," added Sen. Brater. Currently, Michigan is the only state in the Great Lakes region without a water withdrawal statute. The legislation being proposed would mitigate water withdrawal as well as set guidelines on pollution effluents and sewage treatment.

"The main goal of these forums is to gather input. We want to hear the concerns of the citizens so we can ensure legislation that both meets the needs of the community and works once it is put into practice," shared Brater. The Democratic Caucus plans to host town hall events focused on water quality throughout the state. Future meetings are planned for Muskegon, Monroe, Grayling, the Upper Peninsula, and St. Clair Shores.

More information and the town hall schedule will be available in the near future at <a href="https://www.onemichigan.com">www.onemichigan.com</a>.